

## **"Transit-oriented" development plans are meaningless without transit**

by Miriam Schoenbaum • July 24, 2012 2:15 pm

In Clarksburg's Master Plan, the Montgomery County town is a transit-oriented community. But in reality, Clarksburg is a transit-lacking community, because the county government has not supported transit.

Construction has begun in Cabin Branch, Clarksburg's first development west of I-270. Cabin Branch is 535 acres approved for 1,886 houses, 500 senior units, and 2.4 million square feet of commercial space. And Cabin Branch is transit-oriented development.

Or, rather, "transit-oriented" development.

The transit that Cabin Branch is oriented around is the terminal station of the Corridor Cities Transitway at Comsat in Clarksburg, a planning consultant told the Boys Civic Association last week. The station is located a mile or two east of Cabin Branch, on the other side of I-270. Residents will travel to this station via Newcut Road Extended, a 4-lane divided arterial highway with a separate bike path and an interchange with I-270.

However, the new residents of Cabin Branch may find it hard to actually use this transit, because there is no Corridor Cities Transitway station at Comsat. In fact, there is no Corridor Cities Transitway at all. And the Newcut Road crossing of I-270 does not exist either.

Nonetheless, despite the absence of transit, it is legitimate to refer to Cabin Branch as transit-oriented development. Why? Because the Clarksburg Master Plan says so.

Some background on Clarksburg: Clarksburg is the last corridor city along I-270 in Montgomery County's 1964 land use plan, called On Wedges and Corridors. Roughly 6 miles north of Germantown and 12 miles northwest of the Shady Grove Metro station, Clarksburg is both a historic small town and, since 2000, a neo-traditional new suburb. The 1994 Clarksburg Master Plan governs the town's development.

This Master Plan refers to the transit-orientedness of Clarksburg development at least 24 times. For example, "...the most critical function of this Plan is to establish a strong public commitment to the vision of Clarksburg as a transit- and pedestrian-oriented community...", the plan says on page 1. "Transit is an essential feature of this plan; without it, the Plan's vision cannot be realized," the plan says on page 22.

The plan envisions a transit system consisting of 3 parts:

1. A "regional transitway," extending from Shady Grove to the City of Frederick, with a stop in Clarksburg Town Center;
2. An additional "through-transit" system in the form of the existing MARC station at Boyds, 2 miles south of Cabin Branch; and
3. A "comprehensive" network of local buses linking neighborhoods with the regional transitway and the Boyds MARC station.

For Cabin Branch specifically, the Plan says that "the opportunity to provide a transit-oriented residential neighborhood" is one of the "most important public policy objectives" (p. 64). Also, it says that the "Plan endorses a transit-oriented development pattern...which will place all residents within convenient walking distance (one-quarter mile) of a bus stop," with the "neighborhood core to be located so that bus service will link the area to the transitway to the east, and the MARC station to the southwest" (p. 68).

Fine words.

But the Master Plan does not link these words to deeds. There is nothing in the Master Plan's staging requirements about the transit that, according to the plan, is "essential" for turning the vision of Clarksburg into reality. The staging requirements relate only to water quality reviews; provision of water and sewer service; amount of retail development; number of building permits; and the financing of public facilities. Note that, according to the county's Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance, public facilities include roads, but they do not include transit.

As a result, the transit-oriented development in Clarksburg has proceeded without transit.

In 1994, the Master Plan stated that "[a]t present, transit service consists of a limited number of buses on existing roadways and the commuter rail station in Boyds."

18 years and more than 12,000 new Clarksburg residents later, transit service still consists only of a limited number of buses (2) on roadways and the commuter rail station at Boyds.

Of the 2 buses, 1 runs every half hour on weekdays between the county jail in Clarksburg and the Germantown Transit Center. The other runs every half hour during weekday peak hours between Clarksburg and the Shady Grove Metro station, a 45-minute trip by the schedule.

Meanwhile, the Boyds MARC station has limited service, an 18-space parking lot that is already often full, and no bus connections. In fact, there is not even a bike rack.

So when people start moving next year into the "transit-oriented" Cabin Branch development in "transit-oriented" Clarksburg, they will have little choice but to drive. Montgomery County says all the right things about transit. But what Montgomery County actually acts on is cars.